



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 114th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 162

WASHINGTON, MONDAY, FEBRUARY 29, 2016

No. 32

Senate

The Senate met at 3 p.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JONI ERNST, a Senator from the State of Iowa.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Lord of life, hear our prayers. Fill us with Your Spirit so that we may please You. Empower our lawmakers. Help them not to have an excessive focus on temporary things while ignoring an eternal perspective. May their lives bring glory and honor to Your Name, as You create in them humble and contrite hearts that are willing to serve You and humanity.

And Lord, as our Nation prepares to elect a new President, may Your providence, not our wisdom, prevail. Demonstrate Your power so that we may remember that nothing is too difficult for You.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Presiding Officer led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. HATCH).

The senior assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, February 29, 2016.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby

appoint the Honorable JONI ERNST, a Senator from the State of Iowa, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ORRIN G. HATCH,
President pro tempore.

Mrs. ERNST thereupon assumed the Chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

PRESCRIPTION DRUG ABUSE

Mr. MCCONNELL. Madam President, there is an epidemic sweeping across our Nation, ripping through communities, tearing families apart, striking at the vulnerable—even babies who have yet to take their first breath. The prescription opioid and heroin epidemic does not discriminate by demographic or socioeconomic status, by age or by gender. It touches parents and children, neighbors and coworkers in all 50 States. It is ending lives at recordbreaking rates, and it is getting worse. Deaths from opioids have surged by 200 percent over the last decade and a half alone. In my home State of Kentucky, drug overdoses continue to outpace the number of fatalities from traffic accidents.

This is an issue we have been combating for some time, and we have made some important strides along the way, but there is a lot more to do. This week we have an opportunity to take an important step forward. One of the most painful aspects of this epidemic, as I mentioned, is the increasing number of infants who are born dependent on opioids such as prescription pain killers and heroin. These children start their lives suffering from drug dependence, which is nearly as hard to imagine as it is heartbreaking.

Last year, I sponsored a bipartisan measure designed to help address this

specific issue. I appreciate the senior Senator from Pennsylvania, Mr. CASEY, for working across the aisle with me to advance the Protecting Our Infants Act through Congress, and I am proud to say it was signed into law just a few months ago. It is an example of one of the many steps we have already begun to take as we address this epidemic.

We took another step forward last week when the Senate voted to confirm a new FDA Commissioner. I have been very clear that the FDA must take a stronger approach in regard to this epidemic and its prevention efforts, which is why I appreciated Dr. Califf's expressed vision for positive change at the agency. I voted for his nomination last week, but as I told him, he should know that we will continue to ensure oversight over his agency's response going forward.

This week, we have another opportunity to take a step forward—an important step forward. Before us today is bipartisan legislation that would help combat the prescription opioid and heroin epidemic at every level. The Comprehensive Addiction and Recovery Act, or CARA, is the product of a lot of hard work and bipartisan work by a number of Senators.

I would like to recognize the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, the Senator from Iowa, and the ranking member, the Senator from Vermont, for acting swiftly to pass this bill through committee on a voice vote. I appreciate the assistance and cooperation of other leaders on this important issue, such as the chairman of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions and the ranking member from the State of Washington.

I also want to thank the sponsors of this bill, the junior Senators from Ohio, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island, and the senior Senator from Minnesota. These leaders understand the toll this epidemic is taking on our communities. They have studied the issue closely in their home States, and

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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